

BRITISH - TASMANIAN RELATIONS BETWEEN 1803 - 1828.

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A Thesis submitted as part requirement for
the Degree of B.A. (Hons.) in the University
of Tasmania.

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Frontispiece: Hobart Town circa 1822,
courtesy Tasmanian Archives.

Map: inset between Chapters 1 & 2,
courtesy Tasmanian Archives.

F.L. von Bibra, Schilderung der Insel
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Hamburg 1823.

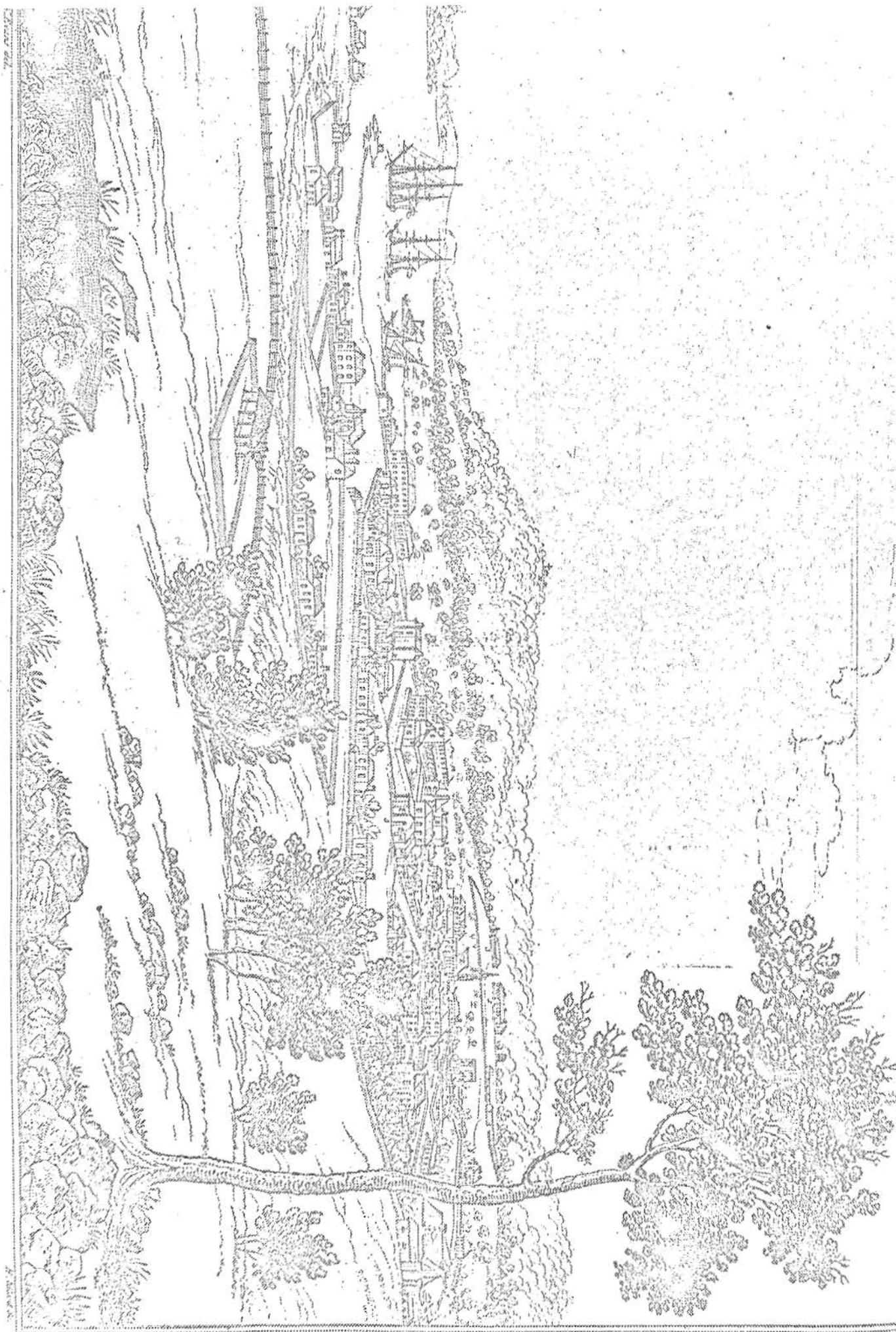
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INTRODUCTION

During the years between the colonisation of Van Diemen's Land in 1803 and the first declaration of martial law in 1828, attitudes between native Tasmanians and British settlers changed from an uneasy acceptance, to outright hatred of each other. From an early date the colonial government had stressed the equality of the Tasmanians as British subjects. Each administrator, in turn, declared that the aborigines were protected by, and subject to, British law. Government attitudes towards the aborigines were paternalistic. Its policies were ineffectual. In reality the Tasmanians were ignored as long as they accepted the treatment dealt by white settlers.

As white population increased and settlement spread into the interior, mounting economic pressures on the Tasmanians brought changes in attitude between the two races. The savage war for possession of the land, ill-fated for the diminishing Tasmanians, was finally and officially recognised for what it was. In 1828 the government adopted a course of action which led to sterner measures in 1829, and the campaign of 1830. In 1835 Governor Arthur, a man of great conscience who had been forced to banish the sad remnant of the

Tasmanian race from its homeland, still found their situation extremely painful. In a letter to Viscount Goderich, Arthur wrote:

"A fatal error in the first settlement of Van Diemen's Land that a treaty was not entered into with the Natives, of which Savages well comprehend the nature; had they received some compensation for the Territory they surrendered, no matter how trifling - and had adequate laws been from the very first introduced and enforced for their protection, His Majesty's Government would have acquired a valuable possession without the injurious consequences which have followed our occupation, and which must ever remain a stain upon the colonization of Van Diemen's Land..."¹

It is not my intention to simply retell the tragic story of the Tasmanians losing battle, or to recount the atrocities which have been discussed at great lengths by the historians of the period.² This thesis is concerned with the changing attitudes of both aboriginal and white populations during the first twenty-five years of settlement and the points of friction which caused them.

1. Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Vol. 2,
(Papers and Proceedings 1952-53) pp. 84-85.

2. See Bibliography.

CHAPTER 1

THE YEARS OF ORIENTATION

During the thirty years prior to British colonisation of Van Diemen's Land, a number of British and French exploratory expeditions sailing in Southern waters anchored off the Tasmanian coast and made contact with the aborigines. In general the Europeans were well received. Although several hostile incidents were recorded such demonstrations only occurred after the visitors had behaved tactlessly towards their hosts. Any assessment of native people was made from comparison with European civilisation and inevitably the stone-age Tasmanians were regarded as occupying a very inferior position in the human race. In these early meetings the aborigines had displayed a capacity for friendliness and co-operation and gave every indication that amicable relations with another race could be maintained. Harmony naturally would be subject to certain conditions such as respect for tribal laws and customs and also to the absence of competition. For the Tasmanians were supreme in their environment and had never been challenged from outside in their ownership of the land.

Among the early exploration parties those individuals who had most success in their dealings with the natives

were the officers and natural-scientists who were intelligent and cautious in their approach. The brash antics of their seamen, however, pointed ahead to the trouble caused by Europeans of low intelligence when coming into contact with a different culture. During his meeting with a group of Tasmanians in 1777, Captain James Cook was favourably impressed with the temperament of these primitive people. Like the Frenchmen who came to Van Diemen's Land later in the century he found them openhearted cheerful and courteous although intellectually "dull and torpid".

Cook was given the opportunity to comment on one aspect of relationships between different races and disparate cultures. Observing the reaction of aboriginal men and women to the amorous advances of his seamen, Cook remarked:

This conduct of Europeans amongst savages to their women is highly blameable, as it creates a jealousy in their men that may be attended with consequences fatal to the success of the common enterprise and to the whole body of adventurers... I believe it has been generally found among uncivilized people, that where the women are easy

of access the men are the first to offer them to strangers; and that where this is not the case, neither the allurements of presents, nor the opportunity of privacy will be likely to have the desired effect.³

The Tasmanian women displayed a modesty and moral rectitude different to the attitudes of other islanders in the South Pacific. Cook drew a comparison with Tahiti where love was bartered for a handful of nails and became the basis of commerce between islanders and Europeans.⁴ But where the Tasmanians did not appreciate the gifts that the white-men offered and were disdainful of articles which they did not recognise, the Tahitians required iron. Because they needed something that only the white men possessed and in return could supply a commodity which the sailors lacked - the Tahitians and other Pacific islanders evolved a barter system based on mutual needs. As yet the natural resources of their land supplied the Tasmanian's few needs and not until closer contact was made with white men did their moral

3. Clive Turnbull, Black War, (2nd ed. Melbourne: Landsdowne Press Pty. Ltd., 1965) p. 6.

4. V.G. Kiernan, The Lords of Human Kind, (London: The Trinity Press, 1969) p. 245.

behaviour change in proportion to their desires for European commodities.

In their initial meetings with Europeans the Tasmanians generally displayed a lack of hostility towards members of a different race, but this was possibly due to the circumstances of the visits. The white men had not set up camps or given any indications of wanting to occupy any part of the land and usually stayed close to the shore during their brief visits.

It is not possible to know what impressions the Tasmanians in their turn had received. They displayed great curiosity in the physical appearance of their visitors, examining their complexions and clothing with interest. From the behaviour of the Europeans who made overtures of friendship and who quickly retreated when offence was taken, it is possible to conjecture that the aborigines felt little to fear from another race. As long as no point of friction existed, such as might come with close and prolonged contact, there was no reason not to be friendly to peaceful visitors, as by nature the Tasmanians were a courteous people. Had they from the beginning of British interest and occupation exhibited more warlike characteristics, the extirpation of their race may have been averted, or at least their

rights of possession in the land acknowledged and defined. Only force could have won the respect of would-be colonisers in these early years of advancing Imperialism - as the example of the Maoris proved. But in New Zealand the British were not dealing with Stone-Age people.

Accordingly, when Lieutenant Bowen arrived at Risdon Cove to take possession of the island in the name of the Crown, he carried no instructions to negotiate with the Tasmanians. No trouble was expected from the aborigines and no consideration was given to their possible reaction to British takeover. The administration of a bi-racial colony was begun as if the present majority of its inhabitants did not exist. It was not until some months after the Risdon landing that Lieutenant-Governor Collins arrived bearing Lord Hobart's instructions for dealing with the natives. Collins was urged to take every means in his power to open an intercourse with the Tasmanians, to win their friendship and to punish any offender who tried to harm them or interfere with their means of livelihood.⁵

The first meeting between Bowen's party and the Tasmanians came a few hours after disembarkation. A solitary

5. C. Turnbull, The Black War, p. 20.

native entered the camp and examined its contents with interest. He seemed quite satisfied with the arrangements they had made and also appeared to define the limits of their location. "By his gestures they inferred that he discharged them from their trespass. He then turned towards the woods and when they attempted to follow he placed himself in the attitude of menace and poised his spear."⁶

Bowen's camp had been set up near a common meeting ground used by local tribes for corroborees and in an area that was well stocked with kangaroo. The everyday affairs of the small group must have been well supervised by roving parties of native hunters. Describing the Derwent settlement, established several months after Risdon, the Sydney Gazette (March 1804) drew attention to the friendliness of the aborigines. They were used to meeting white men from the camp during hunting expeditions and appeared to have become accustomed to musket shots, but were too shy to accept invitations to enter the camp.

In the light of this report, the aborigine's timidity, and their apparent acceptance of the white settlements, the tragedy occurring two months later at Risdon is even

6. John West, The History of Tasmania, Vol. II, (Tasmania: Henry Dowling, Ltn., 1858) p. 6.

more difficult to understand. The cause of this massacre was never satisfactorily explained and the motives behind Lieutenant Moore's irresponsibility remained a mystery. This affair, together with other events during Governor Collins administration was given a sinister aspect for later generations by reports that immediately upon his death in 1810 all official papers and records were destroyed.⁷

Those concerned in the massacre had said very little about it at the time. Lieutenant Moore's evidence was bald and unsatisfactory. Governor Collins who was not an eyewitness was very reserved in his reports to Sydney, adopting the attitude of least said soonest mended.⁸ A convict eyewitness, who could be regarded as being more impartial than those who had actually participated, was not required to tell his story until twenty-eight years later. This man, Edward White, had watched a crowd of possibly three hundred aboriginal men, women and children, herding a mob of kangaroo before them, and apparently making for the open ground believed to be used for corroborees. In reconstructing the events of the day for

7. James Bonwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, (London: Sampson Low, Son and Marston, Fleet St.) p. 39.

8. R.W. Turnbull, The Early History of Tasmania, Vol. II, (Melbourne University Press, 1939) p. 17.

Governor Arthur's committee of enquiry, White discounted rumours that the natives had manhandled a settler and his wife and that this had caused the soldiers to attack. The supposed victim, he argued, lived across a creek out of the path of the advancing natives who appeared from a different direction. If they had shown animosity, which White disbelieved, why had they not attacked him as he calmly continued his work as they passed by?

In the north of the island, the small party under Colonel Paterson had established camp at Port Dalrymple in territory occupied by a large tribe. No contact was made until late in October 1804⁹ when a sergeant was attacked by a group of natives and his two companions were forced to fire in self-defence. The circumstances of this attack are unknown, and apparently it occurred during a friendly, chance meeting. The possibility has been raised¹⁰ that the sergeant was not altogether an innocent victim and that the "liquor-loving" soldiers had been offensive towards aboriginal women.

9. West gives the date of the settlement of Port Dalrymple by Colonel Paterson and a small party of convicts as October 16, 1804. Other historians claim this party landed "in November". West, History of Tasmania, Vol. I, p. 31.

10. Borwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 37.

A few weeks later, a small party from the camp had their first sight of natives when they were confronted by an equally surprised group of tribesmen. The white men, vastly outnumbered, returned to camp, as the aborigines, on recovering from their initial surprise, had assumed menacing attitudes. All went well on this occasion. The Europeans remained calm and pacified the natives, who were induced to enter camp and receive gifts. A short time later however, the natives returned and attacked the camp, spearing one of the company and wounding several of their cattle. No reason was to be found for this attack. Either the tribesmen were outraged at trespass on their lands or loutish behaviour from the soldiers had provoked the attack.

During the next few years native attitudes towards the Europeans varied between friendliness and unaccountable acts of hostility. Two small children who wandered from their home outside the camp at Hobart were found and kindly treated by natives. One of the pair in later life recalled their friendliness and good behaviour on many later encounters, despite the belief of her parents and others that the Tasmanians were cannibals.¹¹ In 1805 the aborigines first killed a white man as he,

11. *Ibid*, p. 39.

a convict, was chasing a kangaroo. Obviously this was the penalty for poaching. Two years later another convict, who had given presents to an aboriginal, was killed by this supposed friend who approached the unsuspecting white man trailing a spear between his toes.¹² This apparently treacherous behaviour could have arisen from the Tasmanian's anger at the invasion of tribal hunting grounds which had begun in 1805.

Following the massacre at Risdon the aborigines had avoided contact with the settlers, so that the first bad impression of white men remained unaltered for at least some tribal groups. By 1805 a serious shortage of food in the settlements brought the colony's first major problem and also established the first point of friction between the two races. For the next three years, famine conditions were experienced. To feed the settlements, convict volunteers were armed and sent into the bush to hunt kangaroo. The colonists were only able to exist because they now lived almost exclusively from native resources, and tribal property-rights were affronted by this wholesale trespassing of white hunters. Although on a much smaller scale, the events of these years were similar to the effects caused by economic

12. Turnbull, The Early History of Tasmania, Vol. II, p. 57.

dislocation of tribal life in the twenties. The roles in this first decade however were reversed. At this time it was the white minority who were fighting for survival, but they did not realise that hostile demonstrations by aborigines held any special significance. Encounters with the Tasmanians occurred more frequently after 1805, and always by hunting parties. In 1807 a party from the Derwent settlement were driven back to camp by angry natives who killed one man and took possession of their kangaroos. Later another hunting party was attacked and in the fracas, two aborigines were killed.¹³ Hunting became an increasingly dangerous occupation for the convicts-turned-bushmen, many of whom adopted a precautionary habit of shooting natives on sight.

Considering that several hundred white men now roamed the bush and slaughtered large quantities of kangaroo and emu, hostile incidents were relatively few and did not indicate a general attitude among the aborigines. These attacks on white men were believed by the settlers to derive from the desire to avenge the Risdon massacre, and to be confined to particular groups. The tribes which lived on the eastern bank of the Der-

13. *ibid*, p.57.

went were always more hostile than those on the western side and in the D'entrecasteaux Channel district. This encouraged colonists to believe that the massacre was responsible for their hatred. Not all men who encroached on native preserves met with hostility. During these years of scarcity a marine named Germaine, accompanied only by a dog, had adopted a way of life similar to that of the aborigines. In his estimation the Tasmanians were completely harmless, and he believed that hostility was instilled in them by the outrages of the "bush"-rangers.¹⁴ Germaine's success may have partially derived from his outlook that there was nothing to fear in the bush, and from his acceptance of aboriginal ways which may have inspired more confidence from the natives.

Scarcity had called for desperate measures, and from the necessity of turning convicts loose to forage in the bush came the major problems of the next decade. Although not all of these foragers became the "banditti", so often referred to in later government despatches, once discipline had been relaxed it could not be easily reimposed. Men who had placed themselves outside the laws of society and had only known the horrors of slum-life and the hulks, were now placed in a position of power by virtue of the

14. Bonwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 43.

firearms they possessed. Not unnaturally many preferred to stay in the bush, out of reach of authority, to enjoy a kind of freedom such as they had never known before. Banding together for protection against the tribes whose women they molested, they gained a living from hunting the kangaroo and preying upon the human inhabitants. It was not long before the term "bush-ranger" came to mean more than just a tough woodsman. And when in 1808 the hunters were ordered to return to the confines of camp - the distinction became apparent. Those who had abandoned all restraints on social and moral behaviour refused to return to the harsh discipline of penal servitude. The severity of punishments and the lack of gaol-buildings also induced men under sentence of punishment to hide in the bush. Not all of these men adopted the violent way of life usually associated with bush-ranging.¹⁵ Many of the absconders returned when Collins granted amnesty, but those who stayed in the bush became "bush-rangers" in every sense of the word. Their freedom and way of life was admired by those left to labour under harsh masters, and they remained at large through the assistance of convicts who believed that the bush-rangers would revenge their harsh

15. West, The History of Tasmania, Vol. II, p. 130.

treatment.¹⁶

Not only did the bush rangers prove obnoxious to peaceful settlers but they became the aborigines most brutal persecutors. Combined with a natural viciousness was the fear that the natives would betray their hiding-places, and they slaughtered the Tasmanians "... as so many sparrows". The notorious Lemon and Brown, whose combined activities by 1808 were menacing the occupation of lands around Hobart, were reputed to have used captured aborigines for target practice. The crimes of the bushrangers against the Tasmanians ranged from rape, infanticide and emasculation, to mass-murder.¹⁷ Michael Howe, the self-styled "Governor of the Rangers"¹⁸ although possessing some native allies and a Tasmanian mistress is also believed to have murdered other natives indiscriminately. His mistress, Mary, lived with Howe for three years until Howe attempted to shoot her when capture appeared imminent. Mary was rescued by a military party and proved helpful to the government by betraying the bushrangers hideouts.¹⁹

16. *ibid*, p. 130.

17. Bonwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 61.

18. West, The History of Tasmania, Vol. II, p. 133.

19. *ibid*, p. 131.

The convicts, who were assigned as stock-keepers on the outskirts of the settlements soon slipped into a lawless way of life. They became allied with the bushrangers as much from natural sympathy as the desire for protection which could not be extended by the government. Through the co-operation of the stock-men, the bush-rangers could sell kangaroo meat to the commissary and use the stock-huts as places of refuge and maintain an intelligence system which kept them in touch with government movements.

The disparity between the sexes brought many convicts into contact with the natives. Although sexual offences brought reprisals, these were relatively few and far between. In general their lack of aggression was remarkable as crimes against the Tasmanians were well known in the small communities and caused the government great concern. It is likely that the bush-rangers exerted a tight control by terror on the natives, making them reluctant to seek revenge unless the chance for success was overwhelmingly in their favour.

An order was issued by Collins in 1810,²⁰ which warned that violence and murder committed against aborigines would be punished in the manner called for.

20. *ibid*, p. 8.

Two convicts had disappeared and were presumed dead, as one of the men was a notorious and depraved persecutor of natives. Cattle was also being attacked in outer districts and for this the bushrangers were held responsible. Collins had, on two occasions, severely flogged convicts for mutilating natives. Otherwise he made little attempt to enforce a strict code of behaviour which would have provided precedents for later settlers and administrators. After his death an unruly period of interregnum followed which seems to have attracted little attention from historians. Lieutenant-Governor Davey was bequeathed a term of office which saw an extension of wrong-doing towards the natives and the colony's almost complete domination by bushranging.

Very early in Davey's administration attention was drawn to a vicious practice which had grown up within the settlements. In response to general conditions, particularly a recent cattle spearing, Davey issued a proclamation condemning juvenile abductions which he believed to be inciting the natives' revenge.²¹ These aboriginal children were sought by certain settlers who desired to set up a system of juvenile slavery within the colony.²² The children were obtained by intense

21. Borwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 41.

22. West, The History of Tasmania, Vol. II, p. 9.

harassment of their mothers who, in fear of their own lives, were forced to abandon their offspring. Reverend Knopwood blamed the extent of this practice for destroying friendly relations with roving groups of aborigines who were accustomed to visit Hobart, and whom he often fed at his door.²³

Because of their accustomed way of life and migratory habits, it was very difficult for the government to protect the aborigines. The treatment they received was according to the disposition of the white men whom they encountered. Apart from government officials and with the exception of bush-rangers, one class of colonists could not be regarded as more blameable in their conduct than another. Some settlers who were "respectable" because they were not convicts, stole aboriginal children and molested their parents. Other settlers fed the natives and gave them clothing and allowed their children to play and hunt with the tribesmen whose visits were encouraged. Convict servants also mingled with the Tasmanians, but relations often deteriorated from sexual causes. It was a convict however who made a positive contribution towards the Governor's desire to win the confidence of neighbouring tribes.

23. *ibid*, p. 9.

Davey had ordered that whenever natives were encountered outside Hobart, every effort must be used to induce them to visit the settlement. If the government could encourage regular visits to the capital it would be easier to police the natives. Familiarity with white men should also enable the natives to distinguish the evil-doers and their complaints could be remedied. This first conciliator was a man named Campbell.²⁴ His relations with aborigines had been firmly established as he had possessed a Tasmanian mistress for several years. According to the Governor's request, Campbell induced a tribal group residing at South Arm to accompany him by boat, to Hobart. Davey was delighted with their appearance as this group was believed to have been involved in the Risdon massacre and had avoided all contact with the Derwent settlement. It was the Governor's belief that demonstrations of goodwill might help to compensate for past injuries as well as for their sufferings during the current wave of child-stealing. Sadly, a group of drunken louts ended all hopes of permanent conciliation with this tribe. The Tasmanians could not tolerate or understand the sophistries of lewd tavern-humour. They departed hurriedly from the

24. Bonwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, pp. 42-3.

town and in an attempt to reach Bruni Island all but one were drowned in a boating accident.²⁵ Campbell's efforts however were not without value. His kindness to other members of this tribe was believed to be instrumental in saving the life of a settler at South Arm. This man was rescued from certain death when the friendly aborigine chanced upon the scene and persuaded his attackers to depart.²⁶

The fact that Campbell had persuaded a group of aborigines to visit Hobart and that he had won their confidence and gained their friendship indicated that conciliation was possible. It seems that there were points of contact which if properly and patiently explored could have brought the Tasmanian's assimilation into the white community. Campbell's mistress and Michael Howe's Mary, were but two instances of mutually satisfactory relationships which were conducted on terms of more or less equality. Attitudes between the two races even during the next six years were remarkably fluid. Despite the brutality of bushrangers and stock-men and the retaliatory attacks on cattle and unarmed men, hostile actions were individual and localised. For example, in a news-

25. op. cit., p. 9.

26. Turnbull, Black War, p. 50.

paper report of an incident at New Norfolk it was stated that for several weeks local tribesmen had menaced settlers and had killed or driven away numbers of cattle. These incidents however, were traced to a private brawl between three stockmen and a group of tribesmen in which several natives had been killed.²⁷ There was no intense point of pressure upon the aborigines to cause smouldering hatred and prolonged or intense hostility. As the Hobart Town Gazette remarked, when reviewing these years "...taken collectively, the sable Natives of this colony are the most peaceful creatures in the world."²⁸

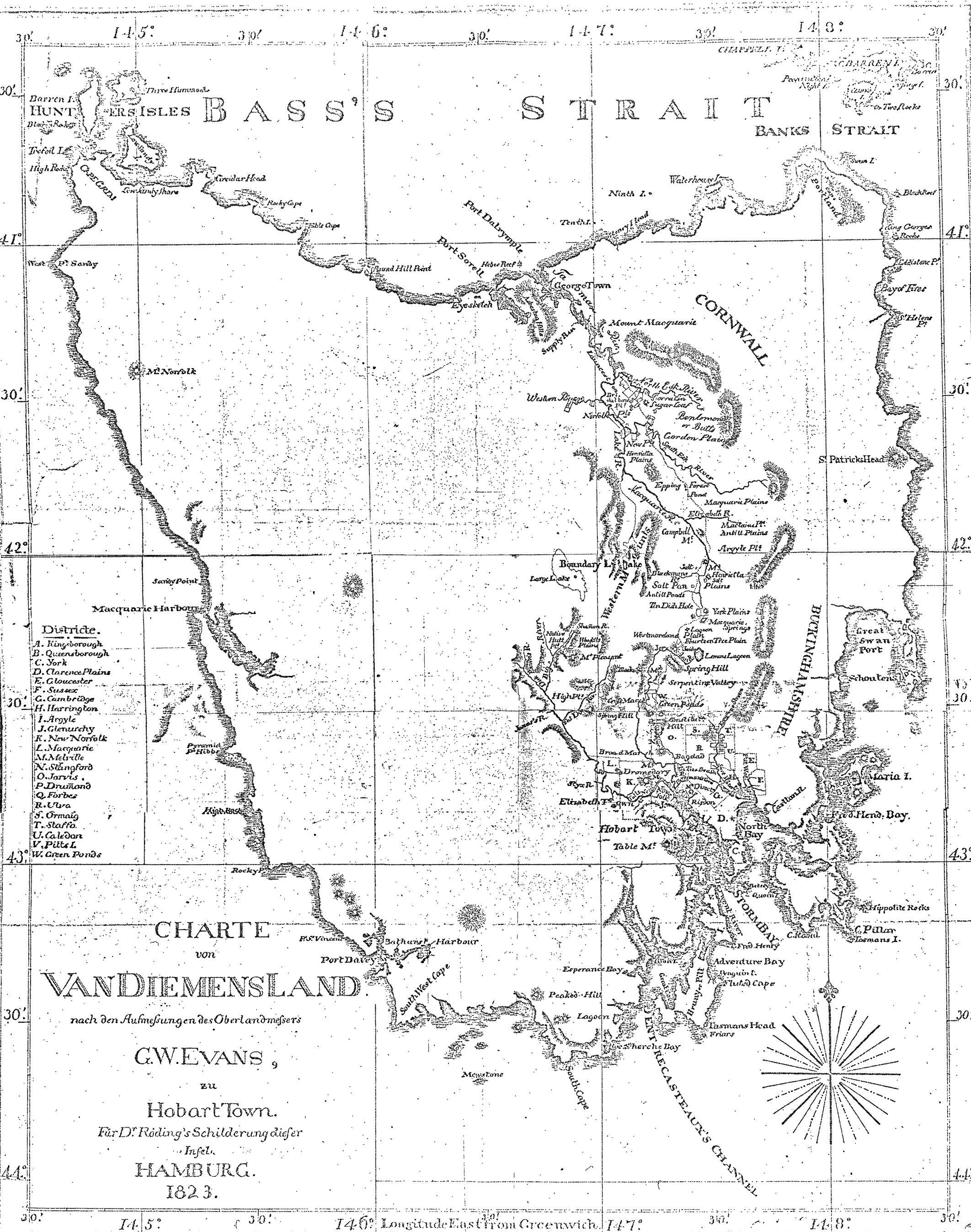
The report issued by Commissioner Bigge after his tour in 1820 summed up the attitudes of the colonists towards the Tasmanians. "There is no reason", he stated "to presume that the black natives are numerous or that they will pose any serious resistance to the extension of the future settlements."²⁹ But relationships with the aborigines were to be dramatically influenced by two new factors which appeared very early in the twenties. The first of these, the introduction of merino sheep had a great impact on the fortunes of the colony and on the

27. *ibid*, p. 51.

28. Bonwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 44.

29. J. Bigge, Report on Agriculture and Trade in New South Wales.

lives of all its inhabitants. While the second development was the arrival of a native leader from outside the colony. A militant, more sophisticated than the Tasmanians, he was to dictate the mood which native reactionaries would adopt during the coming years of extended settlement.



CHAPTER 2

NATIVE RESISTANCE

Governor Sorell's belief that only a preponderance of free settlers could reform the lawless character of Van Diemen's Land dictated many of the major changes occurring after 1817. The industry of farmers and artisans, he believed, would lay the foundations of a firm economy and change the character of the island from gaol to colony. Sorell's preliminary task was to make Van Diemen's Land attractive to prospective migrants by eliminating the chief offenders against law and order. His first attempts at a domestic clean-up were wholly successful. Within three months of his taking office the bushranging gangs had been broken up. This had been achieved by offering large rewards as an incentive to the military to exert itself and for convicts to repress their natural sympathies and turn informers.

Ridding the island of bushrangers did not mean that Sorell had automatically removed all anti-social forces or had greatly improved the aborigines' situation. Two years later the government was still concerned with the continuation of cruelties which were known to bring attacks on stock and occasionally upon its keepers.

1 Order, issued on March 13, 1819 blamed the white

population for the outbreak of hostilities after the peace of the previous year:

"The Lieutenant-Governor is aware that many of the Settlers and Stock-keepers consider the Natives as an Hostile People, seeking without Provocation, Opportunities to Destroy them and their Stock; and towards whom any attempts at Forbearance and Conciliation would be useless. It is, however, most certain, that if the Natives were intent upon Destruction of this kind, and if they were incessantly to watch for Opportunities of effecting it, the Mischief done by them to the Owners of Cattle or Sheep, which are now dispersed for grazing over so great a part of the Interior Country, would be increased a Hundred Fold."³⁰

The Governor obviously did not regard the aborigines as a threat to the lives and property of the settlers and his belief was reinforced by the opinions of older residents. Roderic O'Connor maintained that during this period it was possible for a lone man armed with a musket to cross the island without even sighting a native.³¹

30. Bonwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 53

31. Letter to W.J. Parramore esq. from Roderic O'Connor 1830, CSO/1/323/7578.

If the natives were inoffensive, why had it been necessary to issue an official statement to this effect?

Sorell had pin-pointed the two chief areas of friction by naming the continuing practice of child-stealing and the various cruelties of the stock-men. In areas where little chance existed of being called to account for their misdeeds, the stock-keepers were exposed to all the temptations and hazards of an isolated and lonely life. Many of these men were placed on outposts forty or fifty miles from their master's homesteads and were rarely visited, but left to their own devices. Often through fear and ignorance they attacked friendly natives and believed that they were acting in self-defence. Sometimes their cruelties were so inhuman as to suggest the possibility of gross mental disorder, as in the case of the convict turned bushranger who boasted of killing natives to feed his dogs.³² Although British justice failed to catch and punish these malefactors, tribal law operated its own system of retribution. Custom demanded that for any hostile action the members of the offenders' tribe were to be held collectively responsible. Honour could only be vindicated when the first enemy tribes-man had fallen in battle.³³ To the Tasmanians,

32. op. cit., p. 68.

33. M.I.C. Levy, "The Tasmanians", Pt. II, Tasmanian Historical Association, Vol. 3, Papers and Proceedings, 1954.

it appeared that all white-men inhabiting one district were members of the same tribe, so that sometimes an innocent stock-man paid for a neighbour's crime.³⁴

These apparently motiveless attacks on herds or keepers produced rumours of a deliberate plan of extermination against white men venturing into the interior.³⁵ In view of Screll's desire to extend settlement into the interior grazing lands, the acceptance of such rumours could be disastrous to his economic ambitions. Therefore, his proclamation can be interpreted as an attempt to bring the situation between the two races into its proper perspective by naming the trouble areas, and also as a warning to future aggressors.

Accelerated immigration after 1819 soon gave a different character to the countryside. Previously, settlement had been localised on the Derwent and around Launceston. Very few large properties had been located while much of the farming population lived at subsistence level on poor holdings. Grants and subsidies to the migrant families encouraged movement away from the older settlements as farmers sought good land in new districts.

34. This was a common belief among settlers during this period and has been referred to in settlers evidence and by Bonwick and West.

35. This is a common theme running through witnesses evidence taken in retrospect, by the Aborigines Committee 1830.

As the frontier was pushed further back behind the rich interior grass-lands, tribal territories diminished in area and the second phase of Tasmanian-British relations began.

In 1820, with Governor Macquarie's blessing, Sorell introduced and distributed to carefully selected applicants the remainder of a flock of three hundred improved merino lambs purchased from John Macarthur. Although deaths during transit and after landing reduced the flock to less than two hundred animals, the survivors laid the foundation of a rapidly developing wool industry.³⁶

Previously sheep had roamed the bushlands with little consequence to native hunters. These early flocks, valued only for their meat, required little attention or supervision, so that few shepherds were employed for their upkeep. Aborigines could still pursue kangaroo without inconvenience from fences. Nor were they hindered in their customary practice of burning the scrub to flush game. But the arrival of the wool industry and the dispersal of settlement throughout the interior brought serious effects to the native population.

Experimentation with cross-breeding and the importation of stud sheep brought a new attitude to sheep-farming

36. James Bischoff, *History of Van Diemen's Land*,
(London: John Richardson, Royal Exchange 1832)
Australiana Facsimile Editions, No. 102, Adelaide,
1967, pp. 45-46.

and a new demand for convict labour. Valuable animals could no longer be left to a precarious existence in the bush and breeding had to be more carefully controlled. Neither could sheep be permitted to roam at will and incur the penalties of trespass, nor provide the poor colters - clinging around the boundaries of larger estates - with a supplement to their diet of 'roo and damper. Fencing, which had existed on only two of the largest properties in 1820,³⁷ now began to appear on the better interior locations and fenced off the finest grasslands, waterholes and creeks. The aborigines were no longer able to pursue game through open tracts of grassland nor camp at many of their favourite watering places. These were now occupied by flocks and herds and were favourite situations for the huts of their old foes, the shepherds and stockmen.

The first repercussions for the aborigines came from the occupation of customary kangaroo pasture-lands. Although fencing and other signs of white occupation were disturbing to native hunters, they were really only irritants and did not effect tribal economy. The dispersal of flocks and herds over the most accessible and fertile grasslands forced the kangaroo and wallaby

37. West, The History of Tasmania, Vol. I, p. 67.

to move into dense scrub and broken terrain so that hunting became more difficult and less rewarding. Because these animals provided the staple foods of the interior and east-coast tribes, the dislocation of hunting-lands had far reaching consequences for inter-tribal relations. Natives in areas most populated by white farmers were forced to poach on the territories of neighbouring and often hostile tribes.

The normal difficulties of their lives, due to the limited resources of their homeland, dictated social behaviour. It was always necessary to ensure that tribal population was kept in balance with food sources, and no area could support two tribes. Without indigenous animal life capable of use for labour or domestic service, the aborigines were thrown entirely upon their own resources. The difficulties with which they obtained food developed remarkable hunting skills. It was this way of life which gave them the superior bushcraft which was to prove their main weapon and their only advantage over the white man.

Tribal boundaries, though unmarked, were well known and trespass was the signal for war. There were certain occasions, however, which called for amnesty and this must never be refused.³⁸ A group which had lost its fire-

38. M.I.C. Levy, "The Tasmanians", Pt. II, p. 15.

stick could safely call upon an enemy tribe and receive a new supply. Safe conduct was also granted to strangers moving towards the coast for seasonal feasting on sea-foods and to those who were journeying inland in search of red-ochre or ballywinne stones. Once these special missions were accomplished fighting recommenced on sight, for although the aborigines seldom pursued their enemies, they did not forget a grudge.³⁹ This method of conducting war was unknown to white men. In later years they commonly called the natives "treacherous" for using ambush and were always at a loss to understand why, after a peaceful wintering at the coasts - hostilities recommenced with the Spring migration to the interior.⁴⁰

Another serious blow against tribal economy was dealt when stockmen or sealers forcibly removed aboriginal women. As in most primitive cultures a woman's social status was inferior but her economic importance was considerable. A chattel to the male members she carried the food baskets, children, and any other possessions excepting spears. It was the women who provided the bulk of foodstuffs, climbing the tall trees for opossum and bird's eggs and diving for shell-fish. As the dietary staple during at least one season of the year was shell-fish, a tribe which was short of women could

39. West, The History of Tasmania, Vol. II, p. 81.

40. *ibid*, pp. 84-5.

face a very hungry winter when kangaroo were scarce.

The agility and competence of the Tasmanian women made them, apart from more obvious reasons, very desirable to the white men leading semi-savage lives far from settlements. During earlier years women had provided a basis for barter between tribesmen, and sealers or stockmen, and in general the arrangements were of mutual satisfaction.⁴¹ Friendly transactions seem to have lasted longer with the stockmen, for the coastal tribes soon learned to hate and fear the sealers. As news of their vicious treatment towards their female slaves filtered back to the tribes, the sealers found it difficult to obtain women and were forced to raid the native camps. Formerly women and children also, had been bought for seal carcasses and dogs which the aborigines prized highly. When sealers demanded too many women and refused to pay the agreed price, hostilities occurred and transactions became impossible. As their difficulties increased due to the depletion of the fishing grounds, the sealers became more vicious in their efforts to capture and hold slave labour. The coastal tribes waged bitter warfare against these white raiders and if the encounters occurred in the bush, the

41. Letter to the Colonial Secretary from Gilbert Robertson, 1830, CSO/1/323/7578.

See also evidence of Mr. J. Kelly, to Aborigines Committee, 1830, CSO 332.

natives invariably emerged victorious.⁴²

The situation between sealers and aborigines reflected, on a smaller scale, the breakdown in relations between the two races which occurred under increasing economic pressure. The areas of agreement became smaller as the Tasmanians struggled to retain their traditional ways of life in a rapidly changing environment. Because of the limitations and the rigidity of their culture they were unable to adapt to meet the demands of a more complex situation. To survive as a race and keep intact their traditional values, they depended upon freedom of movement and an abundance of wild-life, but the conditions which assured these were impossible to maintain under the impact of white economy.

Because they lacked means of communicating with the aborigines, white men were also ignorant of the complexities involved in tribal life, particularly in sexual relationships. Among less imaginative Vandemonians it was commonly believed that bonds of affection such as existed between white men and women were unknown to the aborigines. The aborigines had been partly responsible for fostering this belief by readily exchanging their

42. J.E. Calder, *The Native Tribes of Tasmania*, (Tasmania: Henn and Co. Printers, 12 & 75 Elizabeth St., Hobart Town, 1875) p. 91.

women for European foodstuffs to supplement their normal diet. The strict moral behaviour which had impressed Captain Cook had become very lax during the years of colonisation. As the natives learned to value flour and sugar, they found that these could usually be exchanged for labour or by proffering sex as a commodity which white men lacked.

Where prostitution formed the basis of negotiation with white men it was strictly controlled by the tribe or group. Abduction and rape brought reprisals and had far reaching repercussions in tribal life. Marital relationships involved tribal taboos and kinship laws, so that the abduction of women upset both economy and sexual balance in the tribes. As a result bride-stealing occurred and became one of the causes of inter-tribal friction.

Not all economic transactions were based on prostitution. Sometimes, in the remote districts, aborigines exchanged game for bread, and several examples are recorded of tribes selling labour services to farmers.⁴³ In 1819 a tribe was employed by a settler to gather his harvest and several years later another tribe toiled for many hours to save a property from bush-fire.⁴⁴ A number of

43. Bonwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 43.

44. *ibid*, p. 67.

native labourers were also employed on a regular basis by Mr. Gregson, on his property at Jericho. This arrangement seems to have lasted for a number of years, possibly until the end of the twenties.⁴⁵

In general, however, the Tasmanians were unsuitable for use as a labour force. Their life style, as hunters, was directly opposed to the requirements of the European farmers who were rapidly clearing the old hunting lands of native fauna. The age-old clash of interests between nomads and cultivators was re-enacted in Van Diemen's Land between settlers and aborigines. As the Tasmanians were not disposed or suited to complement European economy, there was no common meeting ground between the two races and no basis for understanding based on mutual dependency.

Increasing economic difficulties in their daily lives, resulting from European occupation, exacerbated the normal jealousies and enmities between the tribes. Traditional provocations inciting war were thus exaggerated by the pressures of white occupation and the tribes warred amongst themselves whilst they fought the greater enemy for survival.

While they continued to be divided into warring

45. Letter to Magistrate, Mr. Anstey, from Thomas Salmon concerning Gregson's protests against military campaign of 1830, 28 September 1830, CSO/1/324/7578

factions the Tasmanians were unable to counter the superior strength of the white men. Their natural timidity and their fear of muskets made the aborigines slow to attack and then only if their victims were seen to be unarmed and helpless. For this reason even in 1822 the natives were regarded as harmless, and from the superiority of armed strength the white men felt free to treat them with contempt. But hatred and revenge were stock-piling against the white population and needed only to be directed by a leader strong enough to unite the divided tribes.

A possible leader for the resistance movement was Mon Buillietta, the chief of the Big River tribe. A splendid and much feared warrior, he displayed the characteristics of an extreme nationalist. His exploits were recorded in the songs of several tribes and even his own people feared his murderous disposition. Tribal chronicles recorded Mon Buillietta's hatred of the white race and his pledge to "kill every white man and soldier" and regain tribal territories.⁴⁶

In spite of the long established and well known hostility of the east coast tribes, the indications of a new militant attitude came from an unexpected quarter

46. Letter to Colonial Secretary from Gilbert Robertson, 9 June 1829, CSO/1/330/7578.

and during what appeared to be a peaceful year. The Hobart Town Gazette did not consider aboriginal activities to be newsworthy during 1823, although much attention was given to agrarian crime. Increased population and extended settlement had also brought problems to the white community and stock thefts and burglaries gained much publicity. Tenant farming became widely practised with poor land being divided amongst men unable to buy anything better. Often the tenants were ticket o'leave men or free by servitude, and made a living by plundering neighbouring properties or from slaughtering kangaroo for skins.⁴⁷

It was in 1823 however that Mosquito, the Sydney born leader of a band of local outcasts, began his short career as a terrorist and inadvertently changed their future for the Tasmanian people. Mosquito did not become a patriot from deep feelings of injury sustained by the aboriginal people, but from personal frustration and the necessity to survive. His first associations with white people are unknown, but possibly the most meaningful were those made during years of penal servitude.

47. Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land, ed. Anne McKay, (Hobart: University of Tasmania, 1962) p. 37.

It is believed⁴⁸ that Mosquito was a member of the Broken Bay tribe which delivered him with an accomplice named Bulldog, to the Sydney authorities for punishment after the murder of one or more native women.⁴⁹ Lack of European evidence made normal court procedure impossible, and although unconvicted of murder, Mosquito and Bulldog were transported to the penal settlement at Norfolk Island. Soon after Bulldog's death, Mosquito was sent to Van Diemen's Land, arriving in 1813 during Governor Davey's administration. Although technically not a convict, Mosquito was put to work as a stock-keeper and from this daily contact with twice convicted felons, he broadened his knowledge of English language and European customs. Mosquito's proficiency in bushcraft brought his promotion as tracker for the roving parties of military and convict field-policemen which carried out the 1817 campaign against the bushrangers. For his part in the capture of Michael Howe, Mosquito was commended in despatches to Governor Macquarie.

48. N.J.B. Plomley, ed., Friendly Mission, The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson 1829 - 1834, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, (New South Wales, Halstead Press Pty. Ltd., 1966) p. 445.

49. Bonwick claims that Mosquito became friendly with convicts working around Broken Bay and was acquainted with many European vices. He also claims that the crime for which Mosquito and Bulldog were sent to Norfolk Island was the rape and mutilation-murder of a pregnant aboriginal woman. Bonwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 92.

Possibly he would have remained in obscurity if his fellow patrol-men had not taunted him with his part in the capture of the bushrangers. Malice appears to have been uppermost in their accusations, as all men had hoped for a reward, but Mosquito had been promised by the Governor that he would be returned to his own country.⁵⁰ When the Governor failed to keep his promise, the jeers of his associates became unbearable and Mosquito retaliated with an attack on a convict.

Mosquito's treatment reflected the attitude of colonial administrators towards the King's black subjects. Although not convicted he was treated as a felon and equal with white men under law. As an adult, human being, towards whom the government had some responsibility, he did not exist. In spite of the government's reiterated desire to give the Tasmanians civil-rights on the basis of equality with white men, no positive attempt was made to establish this ideal. In reality the kindest colonial attitudes were paternalistic and the aborigines were treated as children. And it was not necessary to keep one's promise to a child. At the other end of the social scale Mosquito was still unequal. The convicts might be twice convicted felons, outcasts from their

50. Henry Melville, *The History of Van Diemen's Land*, ed. George Mackaness (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1965) p. 40.

motherland and the scum of the colony, but they were still white. When it came to dealing with these white men, he was nothing but "a bloody hangman's nose".⁵¹

Angry, disillusioned and fearful of another conviction for assault, Mosquito joined forces with a group of renegade tribesmen and began to live as a fugitive. His new companions were outcasts from different tribes who were known as the "tame mob" and lived by begging and prostitution in the districts around Hobart. Dispirited and degraded by their contacts with poor-whites, they readily accepted the more intelligent and physically stronger Australian as their leader. By leaving the servitude of white men and organising his own tribe it seems that Mosquito acquired an identity which soon impressed itself upon both natives and settlers.

The "tame" outcasts who joined him had also, through his leadership, found a way of winning back their self respect. Mosquito had openly challenged white authority and he had learned much from other Europeans to guide him in his future career. For more than ten years Mosquito had associated with those who were regarded as the lowest order in the social scale. He had lived and worked with white convicts and had learned the ways of

51. *ibid*, p. 40.

white outcasts. Not only had he now become an outlaw from convict society but his own people, long ago had cast him out from the tribe. Where was the twice-rejected Mosquito to turn now? It seems more than likely that in the situation in which he now found himself, Mosquito should adopt the only alternative open to absconders and become a bushranger. By emulating the practices of the bushrangers whom he had helped to capture Mosquito's mob could enjoy a way of life which had been denied to them by their own people and by the working of white man's law.

As his reputation grew, he was able to exert influence on the east coast tribes. He persuaded the tribesmen that muskets were not invincible weapons and that once they had been fired the white man was helpless. The years spent among stockmen had given Mosquito a telling insight into their fears of the bush, a factor which could be used against them, and he also knew that few convict servants were likely to be armed. Once the superiority of the musket had been successfully debunked, local tribesmen grew bolder in their attitudes. By 1824 there was a marked increase in aboriginal offences involving robbery and murder. At this time, the areas of hostility were fairly localised, and in the Clyde

district, which was the particular environment of Mosquito's mob, the civil authority became exceedingly fearful for the safety of settlers and property. Justice of Peace, Charles Rowcroft, requested that Governor Arthur would detach part of the small military garrison at Hobart Town for duty in the district. For the Magistrate "has but one Constable", and was powerless to deal with the situation.⁵²

The suddenness of native reaction had taken the settlers by surprise. Many expressed indignation or bewilderment at the replacement of customary native passivity with force. Thomas McMinn recalled that few murders had been committed in the early twenties when "the natives were more addicted to rob than kill". He could not understand the reason for their "sudden bloodthirstiness".⁵³ Roderic O'Connor was appalled by the outrages and stated that the natives had proved to be worse than bushrangers,⁵⁴ although he did believe that they had suffered much provocation. For the first time during the course of their relations with the Tasmanians, the white men began to transfer roles with the aborigines, a reversal which

52. Letter to Colonial Secretary from Charles Rowcroft, 10 June 1824, CSO/1/316/7578.

53. Evidence before Aborigines Committee 1830, CSO/1/323/7578.

54. Letter to Colonial Secretary from Roderic O'Connor, 11 December 1827, CSO/1/323/7578.

increased throughout the coming years. Now stockmen and settlers in the remote districts were placed on the defensive by their former victims and were forced to protect their property, often with their lives. Aboriginal attacks became increasingly aimed at procuring foodstuffs and household goods, such as knives or blankets. A convict servant could be lost with little lamentation, but masters became aggrieved with the theft or destruction of property.

Mosquito did not carry his aggressions to the extremes of later, more militant leaders. It was not his intention to declare war on the white race although he believed that under white rule the aboriginal people were doomed.⁵⁵ But he could not break the bonds forged by his old way of life and often deliberately sought out the company of white men in spite of possible danger. Perhaps the inequalities which he had been made to feel still rankled, or perhaps the awareness of his new tribal status made him anxious to display his power before a white audience. Quite often he visited old acquaintances on friendly if somewhat alarming visits. Such an occasion was recalled by Thomas McMinn, who described the imperious manner in which Mosquito ordered women to retire with stockmen and received

55. Melville, The History of Van Diemen's Land, p. 40.

gifts of food in exchange.⁵⁶ Mosquito made several visits to the property where McMinn was employed and on each occasion shared the white men's meal. He refused to allow any familiarity with his three wives, who always entered the hut with him, while the tribe remained at a respectful distance outside.

Not only was Mosquito causing concern among the country settlers, but bushranging had recommenced in 1824, soon after Governor Arthur's arrival in Van Diemen's Land. This eruption of white-banditry in areas where the government was powerless either to enforce the law or take any preventative measures, may have been a factor in bringing Mosquito's career to an end. With an increase of lawless forces to menace the settlers, the government was forced to move swiftly to check that which appeared to be the most potentially dangerous. The advantages of tackling the aboriginal problem first were obvious. If native insurrection could be stopped before it spread throughout "neutral" tribes, without Mosquito's guidance the dissident groups might return to their former docility. Attention could then be given to rounding up the bush-rangers.

One reason why bushranging had endured for a long

56. Letter to the Colonial Secretary from Thomas McMinn, 1830. CSO/1/323/7578.

period in earlier years was due to the spirit of camaraderie among convict servants towards these former prisoners. Such an ethic did not operate on Mosquito's behalf. An aboriginal youth, Tegg, who had been reared from infancy with a white family was recruited to find Mosquito. Spurred on by the promise of a long coveted boat, Tegg located his quarry unarmed and alone except for his three wives - camping on friendly territory on the east coast. Although Tegg had completed his part of the bargain, the Governor appeared to have forgotten him. Tegg, an intelligent ambitious young man had demanded a boat as payment if he was successful in capturing Mosquito. Accompanied by two Europeans, Tegg had attacked and wounded Mosquito while his companions captured the women. When the boat with which he had intended to begin a trading venture with Bruni Island was not forthcoming Tegg, in a fit of sullen anger threatened to join a wild mob and kill all white men who approached him.⁵⁷ Two months after Mosquito's

57. Bonwick states that many murders were attributed to Tegg and that he was concerned in the murder of two stockmen. Also that he speared to death a pregnant aboriginal woman who had been brought up from infancy by a white family. Bonwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 104.

Melville, however, claims that Tegg never got his boat and died in Mr. Hobb's stock-hut. The History of Van Diemen's Land 1824-1835, p. 37.

execution,⁵⁸ the Hobart Town Gazette April 8 1825 reminded the government of certain parallels between the dead man and his captor, and warned that unless this promise was kept Tegg had a dangerous precedent to follow.

Mosquito's trial⁵⁹ and execution had aroused much interest among the white population. Several leading citizens condemned the whole procedure, for Mosquito and the Tasmanian Black Jack⁶⁰ who was hanged with him, were not provided with counsel. Andrew Bent,⁶¹ who considered

58. Mosquito was captured in November 1824, tried in December 1824.

59. The trial of Mosquito and Black Jack was a grueling ordeal conducted in two sessions on one day. Neither prisoner was represented by counsel and the only witnesses were convicts. Melville raises doubts that any of the proceedings were understood by the prisoners whom he regards as "prisoners of war" and also that the trial was a mockery. Melville, The History of Van Diemen's Land, pp. 37-39.

60. According to Borwick, Black Jack was "civilized" and literate. He appears to have been cruel and vindictive with a burning hatred for all white people. His origins are not known but Borwick regards him as a fitting companion for Mosquito and equally vicious. Borwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 97.

Melville states that Black Jack was ignorant and knew few words of English. Op. cit. p. 37.

61. Andrew Bent was a well known figure in Hobart Town. He established the first permanent newspaper, The Hobart Town Gazette in 1816, and after a quarrel with Governor Arthur who endorsed a rival Gazette, Bent began the Colonial Times in 1826. Melville, The History of Van Diemen's Land, 1824 - 1835, p. 1.

himself as spokesman for educated Vandemonian opinion, believed that the legal proceedings had not been understood by the prisoners. Others drew attention to the fact that the witnesses against them were stock-men. More apprehensive settlers did not believe that Mosquito's death would subdue his followers. In a conversation with his gaoler⁶² Mosquito remarked that hanging was better for white men because they were used to it, and this was interpreted to mean that his death would be regarded by aborigines as an act of war.

Although his career as an insurgent had been brief, Mosquito's influence had been tremendous. An entirely new situation had developed and brought about a public reappraisal of the whole aboriginal question. No longer could they be ignored, for Mosquito had shown that the "sable natives" were prepared to fight to retain a place in their country. Because they possessed neither flocks nor dwellings, the Crown had overlooked their natural rights of possession and had failed to compensate for their economic losses. This injury could only increase with the passage of time and their alienation from tribal lands brought fears - articulated by Mosquito - for the survival of their race. Slowly resistance against the

62. *ibid*, p. 39.

white usurpers gathered strength and permeated areas where good relations had always been maintained. A field policeman from George Town where friendly natives had customarily gathered shell-fish, blamed Mosquito for the break-down in relations between the two races.

"The blacks were harmless enough until Mosquito began his killing work - Then the mobs of Blacks came near George Town no more."⁶³

While individual attacks on persons and property increased during the two years after Mosquito's death, there was no systematic or organised terrorism as the tribes were again without strong leadership. During 1826 the government inadvertently provided the resistance movement with its leaders by giving the Oyster Bay chief a motive for revenge.⁶⁴ In 1824, a sub-group of this tribe had arrived in Hobart Town and was enthusiastically greeted by Arthur, who issued a proclamation to ensure their proper treatment. Some offence had occurred which caused the group to leave town, but they were provisioned by the government and settled at Kangaroo Point. For almost two years they

63. Evidence sworn before Mr. T. Anstey by John Jones, 16 March 1830, CSO 323.

64. Evidence before the Aborigines' Committee, Gilbert Robertson, 1830, CSO 323.

lived in this area until two members - an elderly aboriginal named Dick and a youth Jack, who was brother to the Oyster Bay chief - were arrested and hanged for murder. Some years before, this powerful nation had formed an alliance with Mon Buillietta's Big River tribe to fight a northern confederation. Now with a fresh motive for revenge to add to their long list of grievances, the centre of resistance was organised and the "Black War" began in earnest.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARDS A FINAL SOLUTION

The seeds of hatred and revenge implanted during the early years came to maturity during Governor Arthur's administration. In dealing with the aborigines Arthur could only consider the symptoms of their complaints and these called for their repression as yet another of the island's lawless forces. It was impossible to deal with the real causes of their hostility for these were too far in the past and too closely bound with the welfare of the colonists to be remedied.

Mosquito's terrorism was at its height during 1824 and the general situation between settlers and aborigines had already reached a crucial stage when Arthur arrived in Van Diemen's Land. He believed however that a firm and concerted effort by government and civil authorities could forestall a crisis. For the benefit of the white population, a proclamation was immediately issued⁶⁵ reiterating the aborigines' equality before the law. In this document, the onus was placed for the first time squarely upon district magistrates to see that its terms were enforced. It was their responsibility to inform stock-men who may otherwise remain ignorant of written

65. Hobart Town Gazette, 23 June 1824.

proclamations that they were no longer free to practise their old aggressions. The magistrates were faced with the impossible task of changing the deep-rooted ideas of these ignorant men. In one sense their isolation made them secure and they could now justify their hatred of the aborigines by the wave of hostility inspired by Mosquito. Moral argument and exhortations for compassion were lost upon the stock-men who were in many cases treated as less than human. Even if they were forced to adopt a more forbearing attitude towards the natives they could no longer depend upon the acceptance of their friendly overtures.

The executions of Mosquito and Black Jack had forced many thoughtful Vandemonians to a reappraisal of the aborigines' position not only as British subjects but with respect to their natural rights as indigenous people. The intensification of conflict on the frontier and the implications it held, not only for future relationships but as an indictment of past British indifference - brought a small but steady growth of liberal attitudes towards the aborigines. Practically confined to Hobart Town, these sympathetic colonists in seeking to understand the Tasmanians as a race, also struggled to find an acceptable solution for their plight as dispossessed persons.

The newly awakened interest in native customs and welfare was stimulated early in 1826 by the publication of an extracted article from the Sydney Gazette concerning the work of Reverend Threlkeld among Sydney tribes. This gentleman, who had taken pains to learn a native language, had expressed the opinion that aboriginal children, if separated from their parents' influence, could be turned into useful members of society. The article led to discussion of the level of Tasmanian intelligence, which was conceded to be much lower than that of the Australians, and of the possibilities of civilising and employing them once they had been pacified. While some opinion placed the natives little above the level of "dumb brutes", others pointed to the remarkable feats performed by the sealers' women who had learned navigation and the handling of boats in the difficult passages of the Straits. The Hobart Town Gazette was pleased to draw attention to another exception from what had been generally believed to be an unteachable race by publishing an account of an aboriginal youth, Jack Darling, who was now employed as a deck-hand on the schooner "Darling", and who "looks well in his sailors dress".⁶⁵

65. Hobart Town Gazette, 25 February 1826.

With the trial of Jack and Dick,⁶⁶ two Oyster Bay natives accused of murder, discussion centred around the natives capacity to understand the concepts of Law and whether the workings of a system evolved over many centuries of civilised existence could hold any meaning for primitives. For the Governor, however, there was only one course of action possible. He had emphasised the equality of all men before the law and in fact saw little difference between the Tasmanians and many British convicts who were now serving their time in Van Diemen's Land for similar offences. The aborigines, he thought, "have been designated the lowest order of human beings, removed but one shade from brutality - but I think unjustly...They possess a considerable amount of latent capacity...Hundreds of Irish, English and Scotch are, at the present day, as wild and ignorant as they..."⁶⁷

66. Melville is again critical of the proceedings of this trial which he terms a "farce". Because much difference of opinion had arisen as to the legality and propriety of the trial and execution of Black Jack and Mosquito, care was taken to provide counsel and an interpreter. They were convicted on the testimony of convict stock-keepers for the murder of a stock-keeper William Colley. Dick was suffering from scurvy, and refused or was unable to climb to the gallows platform. He was carried and seated upon a stool, received the sacrament and died "very hard". Jack protested his innocence and died horribly when the rope slipped. Melville, The History of Van Diemen's Land 1824 - 35, pp. 56 - 59.

67. M.C.I. Levy, Governor George Arthur, (Georgian House, Melb. 1953) p. 104.

There could be no accusations of expediency at this trial. The two men were provided with legal counsel and later with the same services of clergy as were given to all condemned prisoners. But only when they were actually on the gallows did the meaning of the proceedings become clear. The horror of the death scene left a deep impression upon the witnesses and caused Arthur's critics to condemn the severity of the punishment. Had the intended warning to other tribesmen taken effect and brought a cessation of hostilities, later judgements against Arthur may not have been so harsh.⁶⁸ Instead, a new wave of violence gave substance to the beliefs of those who regarded the hangings as an error of judgement.

It was useless, argued the critics to try and show natives, with whom no regular channel of communication existed, that white men were also hanged for their crimes. The basis of their disagreement could have arisen from the knowledge that only one white man in the history of the settlement had been punished for an offence against a native. Actually it seemed impossible for an aborigine to receive the same justice as white plaintiffs, although it had been publicly stated, "The Natives of this Island being under the protection of the same laws

68. Melville, The History of Van Diemen's Land, pp.57-59.
Turnbull, Black War, Chapter 4.

which protect the Settlers, any Violation of those Laws, on the Persons or Property of Natives shall be visited with the same Punishment as though committed on the Person and Property of any other..."⁶⁹ The trial had demonstrated that despite the government's wish for legal equality for all its subjects, in reality aborigines would not receive the same justice as white men. The accused men had not been able, or had even attempted to prove their innocence against the overwhelmingly hostile evidence of the stock-keepers. The Crown's case was conclusive and the verdict as expected. Even if the two Tasmanians had understood the nature of the proceedings, which according to contemporary accounts was doubtful⁷⁰ - there were no witnesses to call in their defence.

Because the Tasmanians had no knowledge of Christianity, and this lack no clergyman was eager to remedy, they could not be admitted as witnesses in Court. Thus, the only evidence in a criminal action concerning stockmen and aborigines would naturally be biased. If such a situation had arisen where an aboriginal had been admitted as plaintiff, it would be equally impossible to find Christian witnesses to give evidence upon his behalf.

69. Hobart Town Gazette, 23 June 1824.

70. See Melville, note 66.

Before the law, the Tasmanians though held to be equal were voiceless and had no recourse for their injuries. The guilt of their murderers and assailants could not be proven although many men hanged on other charges were also known to have injured the aborigines. Even when white men were punished it was impossible to know if these executions held any special significance for native observers. Mosquito had declared that these rituals meant nothing to aborigines - for a tribe naturally punished its own criminals. Punishment was a purely domestic affair, inflicted in a manner that offered an avenue of escape for an agile malefactor,⁷¹ and was no concern of outsiders. Any tribe which tried to force its domestic laws and penalties on another was naturally treated as hostile.

While the government complained of the lack of means whereby its goodwill could be communicated to the tribes, hanging four aborigines was not an act to induce their confidence. In the past the main intercourse with the white population had been through men who taught the aborigines familiarity with the worst aspects of British character. There was little opportunity for the Tasmanians who came from a casteless society to form any

71. West, The History of Tasmania, Vol. II, pp.81-82.

understanding of class distinction or to believe that one man was morally different from another. Despite friendly relations established with many settlers the cruelties seemed more indicative of white attitudes. No government spokesman had endeavoured to contact the tribes to point out the differences between government intention and the realities of treatment received from many white contacts. Nor would it have made much difference. An injury was longer remembered and spoke for itself far outweighing the kind words and promises that were not acted upon. As revenge was a high point of honour with the Tasmanians the situation from their point-of-view was already beyond repair by 1826.

Arthur's critics were numerous and administration of the penal colony was made more difficult by the conflicting aims of an increasingly prosperous free community. Few of his actions were likely to be viewed impartially by persons who were inconvenienced by his measures to tighten convict discipline or who simply disliked his personality. The proclamation⁷² issued on the same day as Jack and Dick

72. This proclamation stated that the execution of Jack and Dick "may tend not only to prevent the commission of similar atrocities by the aborigines, but to induce towards them the observance of a conciliatory line of conduct, rather than harsh or violent treatment, the latter being too likely to produce measures of retaliation, which have their issue in crime and death..." The statement continued by urging magistrates and settlers to impress upon their servants the necessity for establishing good relations with the aborigines and ended with the warning that aggression towards the natives would be severely punished. Hobart Town Gazette, 13 September 1826.

were hanged was regarded by some as an official attempt to vindicate a harsh action.⁷³ Actually this document was the last official denunciation of the behaviour which had aroused the enmity of the aborigines. Hereafter the emphasis in official documents was placed on the perversity of the aborigines for refusing to co-operate with their would-be benefactors.

As chief-executive, Arthur was faced with a peculiar problem which had not been encountered in other modern colonial situations. The stone-age Tasmanians were not unified as a nation nor possessed a ruling class which might be persuaded to negotiate with the British on matters of mutual interest. Neither were they capable of use as a labour force, which would have entailed a degree of responsibility towards them from the colonial government. As they were unexploitable, they had been virtually ignored by their new rulers. Instead of improving their lives, civilisation as they encountered it, simply confused their values. Although as a race they were unique, this was not realised in the early nineteenth-century. There were no precedents for dealing with indigenous people on any terms than those already operating in other Imperial colonies. Arthur could only administer his

73. Turnbull, Black War, p. 70.

government's policy in accordance with the beliefs of his age and in the light of his own judgement. Thus, the British administrators were as far removed from understanding aboriginal behaviour as if they had been separated by space as well as time. Arthur's goodwill and humanitarianism was undeniable and he was anxious to extend the good work which Sorell had begun with his aboriginal orphanage. Because his efforts to conciliate the aborigines had not been successful Arthur was condemned for his handling of the situation by critics who were really condemning the policies of their age.

By the end of 1826 Andrew Bent⁷⁴ displayed a changing attitude towards the aborigines from the opinion he had held during the previous year. At that time he had appraised the native character as "a brilliant gem, though casketed in ivory and thus able to repay the polish which British Philanthropy may labour in bestowing..."⁷⁵ Displaying a less liberal attitude Bent now considered the natives to be incorrigible. Far better for all concerned he argued in the Colonial Times "for a party of volunteers to be raised among the prisoners and capture the natives without bloodshed and deport them to King's Island..."

74. Andrew Bent was now publisher of the Colonial Times.

75. Colonial Times, 8 December 1826.

Once resettled the natives could be put to work to provide their own upkeep and in doing so the "seeds of civilisation" would be sown amongst them while honest toil would "instruct them in useful arts for their own comfort - their own happiness - their own security - and their own good."⁷⁶

Two solutions were thus offered by the Times. The Tasmanians would be disposed of in the accustomed manner of parish-paupers, and deterrents to extension of settlement would be removed.

Arthur, however, did not entertain similar ideas of an island work-house. He traced the increased conflict to the rabble-rousing of a few semi-civilised aborigines such as "Black Tom" Birch⁷⁷ who had been a confederate of Mosquito. These ringleaders he believed had been drawn into "Crime and Danger" through their associations with

76. *ibid.*

77. Plomley gives the following account of Tom Birch. He was probably brought up from childhood in the home of T.W. Birch who had properties at Richmond (Muddy Plains) Lovely Banks and Jericho. After the death of Mr. Birch in 1821, his widow married E. Hodgson who had a grant at Green Ponds. Tom was enticed away from the Lovely Banks property by an aboriginal girl and joined Mosquito's mob in 1822. Plomley, Friendly Mission, pp. 104 and 109.

Borwick, refers to Black Tom's corruption by Mosquito and blames him for persuading Tom to leave Hodgson's employ. Tom was soon captured and sentenced to death but Mrs. Hodgson interceded on his behalf and he was sentenced to Macquarie Harbour from where he escaped. Borwick, The Last of the Tasmanians, p. 96.

European criminals, and their capture was now the government's chief objective. A proclamation had been issued on 29 November 1826 which informed of the Governor's new attitude and outlined the powers of magistrates, military and citizens when either arresting or driving native "rioters" from settled areas. This proclamation was immediately held up to ridicule by the Colonial Times. Because the editor had proposed deportation as the only solution and was not hampered by the same considerations and responsibilities, the Times felt free to criticise all government attempts to find an orthodox solution. This proclamation, declared the Times, was "unintelligible to the many" and unrealistic in its intent. Would a settler under attack or in danger of attack stop to consider his legal position, it asked? If, as the proclamation stated, the settlers were free to arm and join with the military to drive away the marauders, how could they manage to do so? "Do soldiers grow in the bush like mushrooms or are they to be conjured up at a moment's notice?...If a Native tribe is advancing towards a hut, well protected, is a Message to be sent to the Military 10 or 12 miles off?"⁷⁸ The Times had pointed out the Governor's ignorance of actual frontier conditions

78. Colonial Times, 4 December 1826.

and of the manner in which aborigines staged their attacks. It also regarded the proclamation as so obscure in expression that settlers might be exposed to prosecution for crimes against the natives. But the Times was equally unrealistic in suggesting after Arthur's measures to tighten convict discipline that he should turn them loose, armed, to pursue the natives. And it had completely overlooked the outcome of meetings between fugitive aborigines and armed convicts with an excuse to kill.

A lively debate had begun among Hobart Town residents regarding the best means of dealing with the problem posed by native aggression. Opinion was sharply divided between Town theorists, some of whom tended to sympathise with the aborigines, and Country residents, who were caught up in a real and dangerous situation. Although a group of townsmen had met the previous year to discuss ways of alleviating the aborigines' sufferings as a step towards ending their hostility, nothing positive had resulted. An anonymous correspondent to the Gazette recalled this meeting and expressed hope that the idea behind it was not lost and would not be blocked by persons with conflicting opinions.⁷⁹ Not only was it the colonists' Christian duty, he wrote, but self interest dictated compensation "for

79. Hobart Town Gazette, 11 February 1826.

that of which we have deprived them". This line of reasoning which reflected the best of liberal intentions could not be tolerated by up-country settlers who believed that the aborigines had little claim to lands that they had not used.

In a letter written some years later to the Colonial Secretary, David Murray,⁸⁰ a land-owner from one of the most troubled districts, reviewed the attitudes of those concerned in the land-war. He denounced the liberal arguments which he considered "emanated more from a sensitive and compassionate breast than from the dictates of a just and imperative policy." He disagreed with those who argued that the natives had been deprived of their birthright and that continuing inhumanity had lost them as possible friends. Far from sympathising with the "elegant and humane calls" of mercy for the dispossessed aborigines, Murray saw the "headlong savage, whose only and infatuated joy is the meditation of our destruction..." Van Diemen's Land belonged to the settlers and their heirs, Murray claimed, not by such arguments as the liberals used to defend the aborigines, that they were prior occupants "on the land whereon the Almighty had originally placed them..." - but by the deed of Royal

80. Letter to the Colonial Secretary from D. Murray, 16 March 1830, CSO 323.

Charter. These Crown-given rights, he noted, were being "insulted with impunity by savages" while the efforts of that "enlightened politician" and the charity of Hobart Townsmen had been so many pearls before swine.

If country-people considered the benevolent ideas of many townsmen unrealistic, it was because they were forced to endure a multiplication of terror unknown to town-dwellers. Bushranging, which had been a parallel menace, by 1827 was surpassed by the crimes of natives who were daily becoming more audacious and more contemptuous of white men. Many aborigines were able to speak a smattering of English, mainly learned from the obscenities directed towards them by stockmen. They used this knowledge to great effect and it was a contributing factor to the psychological warfare which for the settlers was possibly the worst aspect of the struggle. Attacks were always carefully staged, the aborigines showing great patience in selecting a target and waiting for an opportune moment. During some assaults on huts the occupants were called by name and told of the fate awaiting them. One man who was speared several times and survived, was warned by his attackers that they "would have him yet". Overwrought settlers tried to act as sentries while attending their duties and not only were in constant fear for their

own lives, but apprehensive of some dreadful scene of carnage awaiting their return home.

Isolated settlers were also a prey to rumour and to the exaggerations of an oft-retold incident occurring in another district. Many settlers lived in a state of tension which was not always warranted. Other malign influences were at work which equally troubled outlying farms and stock-runs. Where an explanation could not be readily found for mysterious deaths or stock losses, the natives became universal scapegoats. In some districts settlers were forced to abandon farms because of repeated aboriginal attacks⁸¹ and in other areas marauding devils and tigers or packs of starving dogs belonging to natives or herdsmen made sheep-raising almost impossible.⁸² All kinds of crimes were blamed on the aborigines without proof or evidence, and any servant who suddenly disappeared from his master's property was usually presumed killed by natives. Often one of these absconders was discovered months after his supposed death, but too late for rumour to be squashed. Gradually the country people became certain that the natives those "Curang Outangs",⁸³ whose very existence disgraced the human race -

81. Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land, (Hobart, 1962) p. 53.

82. *op. cit.* p. 74.

83. *ibid.*, p. 69.

were engaged with them in a war to the death. To some settlers - who were demoralised already by natural hazards and the uncanny moods of the gloomy Tasmanian bush - it seemed likely that the natives who were so much a part of this hostile environment, would eventually win.

Since Mosquito had first demonstrated their powers of aggression, other "Europeanised" natives had improved on the tactics which he had devised. Decoys were used, often women who led parties of white men into carefully laid ambush. Attacks were feigned on insignificant targets to draw off men from neighbouring properties and leave their own premises exposed for plunder. The ability of the tribes to move swiftly over difficult terrain led settlers to overestimate their numbers. Their hit and run method of warfare caused bewilderment and apprehension as to where they would strike next.

The most notable of the semi-civilised leaders was "Black Tom" Birch who led a marauding tribe on a wave of terror for some years before switching to service as a government tracker in the late twenties. Little is known about his early life and prior to his rampage of murder and robbery as Mosquito's confederate and heir, he had lived for a number of years with Mrs. Birch,⁸⁴ presumably

84. See Note 77, above.

as a servant. Tom was well acquainted with white-men and their ways and his special knowledge helped to make him notorious. During an attack on a hut in 1825 Tom had taunted the occupants in their own language and threatened that when the owner fired, his wife would be thrown "into the bloody river".⁸⁵

The audacity and vindictiveness displayed towards his victims brought Birch the status of chief public enemy in the Times' estimation. Tom Birch, the Times declared had formerly and voluntarily become a member of the white community and had lived as a free servant. Now with basest treachery he was using the knowledge he had acquired to the destruction of the society which had shown confidence in him. In emotive terms, the Times denounced Tom as an anarchist, a "civil or internal rebel", who should be caught and lynched on the spot as a warning to others.⁸⁶

The Times was no longer prepared to accept the vague arguments of aboriginal natural rights or the excuses of sufficient causes for their hostility. It declared that if there had been wrong it was in the first planting of the British standard and in the first breaking of soil by

85. Letter to Colonial Secretary from W. Anstey, 1825, CSO 316.

86. Colonial Times 17 November 1826.

a plough. Now all belonged to one community and one government and those who attempted to overthrow this supremacy must be suppressed. In the editor's opinion the preservation of the white community was the first priority and the least consideration for the government was the expense of providing safeguards. Because of the wide and enthusiastic support the Times had received for its deportation policy, it was now the paper's intention "as public journalists to enforce the measure". Thus it was implied that because the government was too indifferent or too parsimonious to protect its citizens, the people were turning to the Press for leadership and guidance. In a war of words, conducted with a vigour reminiscent of the conflict in the countryside, the Times campaigned in opposition to Arthur's policies which were not aimed at a "final" solution but at discovering a means whereby the two races could live in peaceful coexistence.

The Hobart Town Gazette, which sometimes seemed to act as spokesman for the Governor, who could not enter into a public debate, urged a more rational view of the situation. Because a half-civilised leader had gained ascendancy over the ignorant and degraded natives, then a person of good intent would also be able to influence them. The Gazette also pointed out that soon the annual

migration to the coast would begin, for the war had not disturbed the traditional pattern, and during the winter months hostilities almost ceased. Next year, if they returned hostile, the magistrates could capture them according to the Governor's instructions for at night, by their fires, they had always proved easy targets. The enthusiasm for the Times suggestion of expulsion could not be overlooked and the Gazette toyed with the idea of King's Island as a place of detention for the worst native offenders, such as Black Tom Birch.

It seems likely, as the Gazette had hinted, that efforts as early as 1826 had been made to find a person of "good influence" to contact the tribes. In 1827 a letter was written to the Colonial Secretary by the magistrate of Oatlands, Mr. Anstey, informing that no person could be persuaded to undertake this dangerous mission.⁸⁷

The Gazette's fears for the approaching spring were realised; as 1827 saw an increase in aboriginal attacks, but little effective countering by the civil powers. In spite of the government's efforts to distribute its small military and field-constabulary evenly throughout the trouble areas, the ring of armed outposts

87. Letter to the Colonial Secretary from T. Anstey,
4 December 1827, CSO 320.

which encircled the frontier settlements did not deter native raiders. To add to their troubles a new weapon had been brought to bear on the settlers and one which, surprisingly had not been used earlier or to greater effect. The use of fire to burn ricks and crops, or barns and houses, drove settlers to new heights of terror. Frantic calls for military aid were often received too late to be effective for the attackers did not linger at the scene of their crime. In their distress they looked to the government to provide the utmost protection and were furious when personal bodyguards were not forthcoming.

A letter imploring aid was written in 1827 and contained an account of the writer's ordeal when under attack.⁸⁸ "...I have been in houses attacked by white savages" he wrote "but I protest most solemnly to you, the system and fury of these Black Monsters exceeded anything I have yet encountered, the house on fire and these furies dancing outside have made me imagine I had been suddenly transported to the infernal regions". Murder now seemed to be the primary objective, rather than plunder, and the bodies of their victims were often horribly mutilated or smashed to pulp by repeated bashings.

88. Letter to the Colonial Secretary from W. Bryan, 1827, CS0316.

Many settlers were forced to send their wives and children to safer areas or to abandon their farms completely and seek security with a neighbour.

Repeated calls upon the government for aid could not be met with the resources at hand. For although an increase in crime during the middle years of the twenties and the notorious Brady and McCabe had placed a strain on the small military force, the Times continued to denounce the government's "supine" policy towards protecting the interior and screamed for the instant removal of the natives. Increasing pressure from the Press and from private individuals brought sharp criticism from Arthur, who believed that the settlers had adopted a negative attitude towards their own defence. Several incidents where lone stockmen had successfully defended their master's property or where women had courageously fought off marauding natives gave substance to the Governor's complaints that the settlers lacked spirit. If they were more attentive to security precautions and saw that each servant and adult male was armed when attending to farm duties, he believed that the natives would be soon discouraged from attacking. In general, the settlers did not care to carry guns and were understandably reluctant to arm many of their convict servants. Quite often

guns were useless in the dense bush and in ambush attacks and sometimes old and faulty muskets gave a false sense of security through which its owner lost his life. By the end of 1827, as settlers reviewed burnt crops, speared sheep and cattle and murdered families and friends, it seemed to many that eventually whole districts would have to be abandoned as stock-raising was becoming almost impossible.

The hazards of taking up grants during these troubled years is illustrated in the case of Joseph Castle, who arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1827 accompanied by his wife and four children. Castle, who brought letters of recommendation from the Secretary of State for the Colonies and £600 capital, was given a grant of 500 acres at Little Swan Port in the heart of Oyster Bay tribal territory. Leaving his wife and younger children in Hobart Town, Castle and his elder sons set about clearing sixty acres of forest land, draining a lagoon and providing two miles of fencing and several outbuildings for his stock. Within a short time of taking up his grant, Castle became the victim of white sheepstealers, and his flocks were "daily driven away in scores". Because of lack of protection his hut was robbed of "every portable article". Native attacks also resulted in material losses and Castle was

speared so badly that he became permanently afflicted. Unable to continue working the land in which he had invested so heavily, Castle was forced to lease his grant and returned to Hobart Town. Understandably bitter after such courageous efforts, Castle blamed the government for much of his losses for failing to provide adequate protection in areas where it granted land.⁸⁹

By 1828 the conflict was no longer confined to outlying farms and stockruns, but was being carried into the smaller settlements where even groups of strongly built houses were not safe from attack. Arthur was forced to admit that such a mood of savagery called for sterner measures against the aborigines. In a despatch to Viscount Goderich dated January 10 1828, he outlined the problem, the search for a solution and his own attitude towards both colonists and aborigines. He believed that every kind of injury and malice had been practised against the natives from the earliest days of settlement, but that attempts to civilise them had only rebounded against the white community. What had Arthur done to reduce the problem posed by the natives? Everything that humanity and justice had dictated, but it was impossible to be "fair" to a people whose wrongs could not be remedied.

89. Letter to the Colonial Secretary from Joseph Castle, 29 October 1834, CSO/1/216/5189-5210.

Government policies also depended on widespread co-operation from the white community, but Vandemonian liberals were in the minority, and from the rest, the Governor received only endless complaints and cries for help. The only constructive advice had been to deport the natives to a suitable island in the Straits. This was a step which Arthur was reluctant to take, "Not to mention the extreme difficulty of this scheme, nothing short of the last necessity could tolerate so great an aggravation of their injuries..."

A possible remedy was the establishment of an aboriginal reserve, preferably on the North-east coast where shell-fish were plentiful, the climate favourable and additional supplies could be transported by water. On the reserve the government could protect the natives from sealers or stockmen, and if they crossed its boundaries it would be at their risk. But how could traditional enmities which kept some tribes fighting a war on two fronts permit the communal existence of reservation life? Before such a step could be taken the natives must learn to agree amongst themselves and then come to terms with the government. And where would the government find the brave or foolhardy person who would carry its message to the tribes? Black Tom Birch, now a

tracker with the military, was invited to act as negotiator but he firmly refused, pointing out that he would very soon be speared.

The governor gave every indication of wanting to return a portion of their land for the exclusive use of the aborigines. But their intransigence prevented a solution which, though probably unacceptable to the farmers in the interior, would be welcomed by the town liberals. Increasing pressure from colonists and Press forced Arthur to decide to segregate the aborigines from the white community. Reluctantly he had decided on a policy which was "painful and distressing to banish the natives from their favourite haunts" but would give both sides a chance to cool down.

Although country settlers considered themselves to be at war with the natives and some sympathetic colonists saw the Tasmanians as patriots defending their homeland,⁹⁰ the government had not fostered this attitude or belief. The aboriginal situation was rarely mentioned in official despatches during the middle twenties, even though London newspapers carried occasional accounts of the disturbance in Van Diemen's Land. By 1828, however, the tumult had awakened serious concern in Downing St. and fears were

90. Letter to the Colonial Secretary from Robert M. Ayton, 1 March 1830, CSO/1/323/7578.

expressed for the future of emigration. It was necessary for the situation to be quickly controlled before further losses to life and property made Van Diemen's Land a place to be avoided. It was also important that government measures must not be viewed as being unnecessarily harsh or cruel to the British liberal-reformers, who were campaigning so vigourously for justice towards the negro. Arthur's proposal of segregation was received with relief and he was instructed to use no unnecessary harshness in enforcing the measure.⁹¹ The Secretary of State for the Colonies was well aware of Arthur's difficulties. He sympathised with Arthur's position in trying to persuade the Tasmanians that they were deluded in thinking they had prior rights to the land, or in fact, any rights at all. Arthur's concern that the tribes might starve when banished to the periphery of the island had prompted his request that the government might provision the natives. This was granted with a reminder that "His Majesty relies confidently on your limiting it as much as possible..."⁹² and that the beneficiaries must be impressed that it was a favour granted in return for their good behaviour. The segregation order was issued in

91. James Bischoff, History of Van Diemen's Land,
(London: John Richardson, Royal Exchange,
1832) p. 191.

92. *ibid*, p. 193.

April and military parties were sent to the frontier to see that it was enforced. The approaching winter season brought a few months' respite with the migrations, but the colonists were plainly sceptical of any lasting benefits from yet another government measure of which the natives would remain ignorant. If, as the Times maintained that the Press spoke for public opinion and articulated the public's desire, then the government and the settlers were still opposed in the question of the aborigines' future. The settlers wanted to be rid of the natives once and for all and now, The Colonial Advocate indicated, that the only end to the carnage would be either the extermination or removal of the Tasmanians.⁹³ It was deplored that "the sons of the greatest Empire in the world" having beaten the fine armies of France, were now being held to ransom by a handful of "black barbarians".

Demonstrating an ability to get to the crux of the problem, the Advocate spelled out the real danger and the basic cause of the colonists concern. The stock-owners were being forced to abandon their most lucrative property because fear of the natives caused men to refuse to attend flocks and herds. Aboriginal hostilities

93. The Colonial Advocate 1 May 1828

were blamed for the present glut on the meat market and many settlers were facing severe financial losses and in some cases, ruin. Quoting a country settler who stated that unless the aborigines were speedily exterminated meat would soon sell at one penny per pound, the Advocate declared that removal of the natives would not only save lives but would restore the value of cattle and sheep.

With the return of the warm weather the ineffectiveness of the segregation attempt became apparent. In consultation with the executive council, Arthur decided on a course of action which once begun was to end only in a "final solution". His optimism that kindness and patience would change the attitudes of both settlers and aborigines, now gave way to cold reality. Arthur was forced to make a decision and he chose to protect the interests and welfare of his fellow countrymen. It is difficult to know what "unofficial" pressures had been placed on Arthur by the home government, but his despatch of November 4 1828 announcing the application of martial law, drew a testy reply from Sir George Murray.⁹⁴ His Majesty's Government regretted the necessity for this policy but because Arthur had proved "ineffectual" in establishing good relations between the two races,

94. Bischoff, History of Van Diemen's Land, p. 196.

Whitehall was forced to sanction the measure. With very little help from the home government and much hindrance within the colony, Arthur had been forced to the decision that among the island's troublemakers, the Tasmanians were the most expendable.

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